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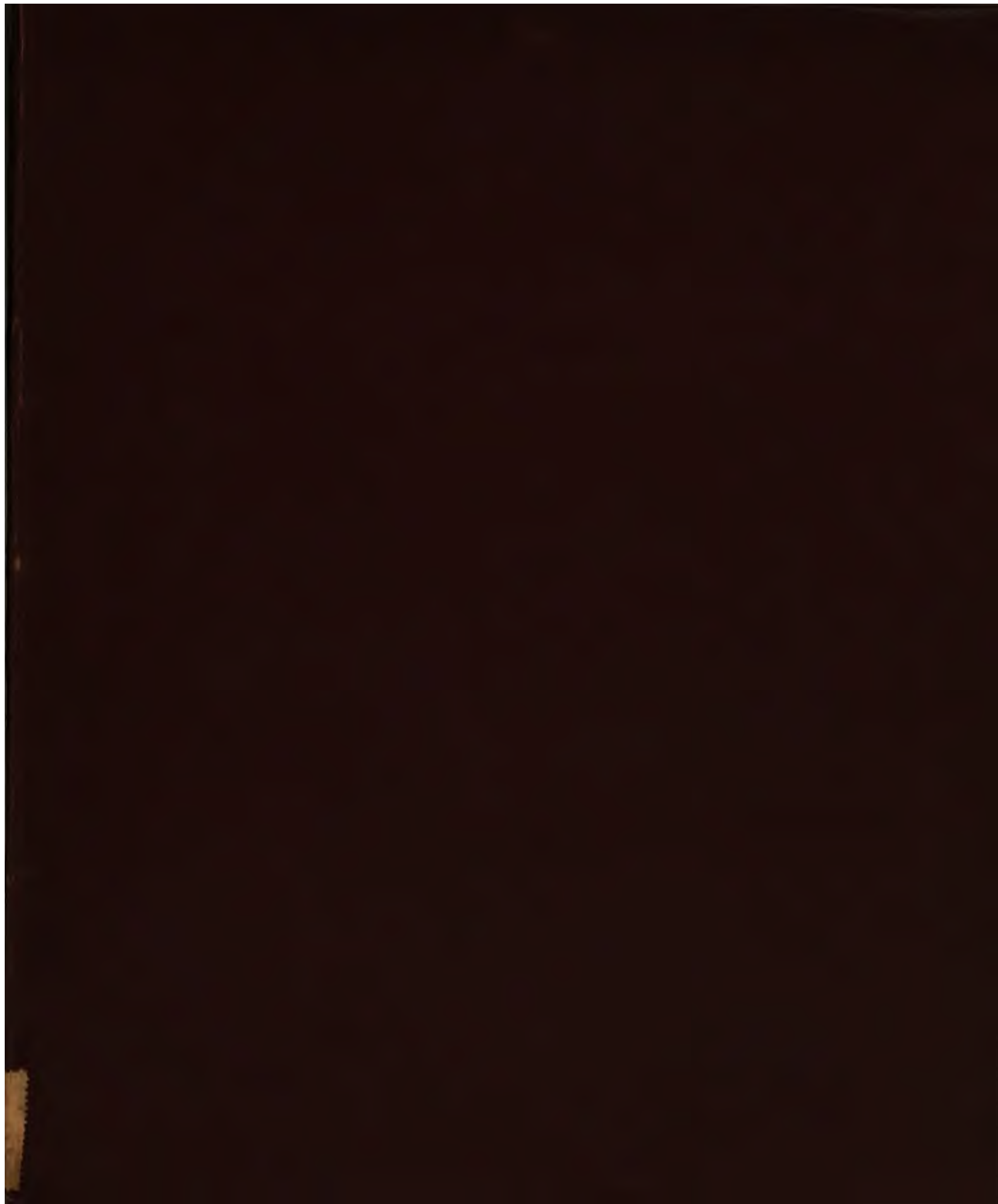
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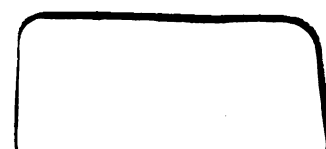
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Miss Stokes.

On two works of ancient Irish Art.

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Ms. A. 1. 1. 1.

Miss Margaret Stokes.

ON TWO WORKS
OF
ANCIENT IRISH ART
KNOWN AS
THE BREAC MOEDOG
(OR SHRINE OF ST. MOEDOG),
AND
THE SOISCEL MOLAISE
(OR GOSPEL OF ST. MOLAISE).

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

BY

MISS STOKES.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY J. B. NICHOLS AND SONS, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

1871.

FROM
THE ARCHÆOLOGIA,
VOL. XLIII. pp. 131—150.



THE BREAC MOEDOG AND THE SOISCEL MOLAISE.

I have the honour to exhibit to the Society of Antiquaries drawings and photographs of two remarkable objects of early Irish workmanship, one of them being a shrine destined for the reception of relics, the other a costly box or cover for a copy of the Gospels. Besides the ecclesiastical destination common to both these works, there is another link between them, namely, their traditional connection with the two famous Irish Saints whose respective names they bear, and who, during their lives, were closely united in the bonds of friendship.

St. Moedoc (pronounced Mogue)^a was born about the year 555 at Inis Breachmuigh in the county of Cavan: he was tenth in descent from Colla Uais, King of Ireland A.D. 336. His name, compounded of three Irish words, *Mo*, *Aedh*,^b *Oc* (or *Og*), signifying "my little fire," was, according to legend,^c given him by his mother; on her husband Sedna, before the birth of the child, seeing in a dream a star falling into his wife's mouth, while she also in a dream saw the moon fall into his mouth. The next day, on relating these visions to learned men, they said to them, "A star led the wise men to worship Christ, and by the same sign is it thereon that a son shall be born to you full of the fire of the Holy Ghost."

In his early boyhood he was delivered as a hostage by the Hy Briuin, his clansmen, to King Ainmire, who ascended the throne of Ireland 568,^d and reigned three

^a Dr. Reeves, *Proceedings of the R.I.A.* viii. 446.

^b This name, which signifies "fire," when adopted into other languages becomes Aeda, Aidus, Aiduus, Ædeus, Edus, Hugh. With the diminutive termination *an*, it becomes Aedhan. "*Aed*, i. e. fire. By inverting the noun *aed* it becomes *dea*, i. e. the goddess of fire; et quod Vestam illam deam esse ignis fabulaverunt, Vesta dea ignis dicitur, i. e. *aed*. Cognate with *aiθos*."—O'DONOVAN. Also with Lat. *Aedes*, Skr. *edhas* "firewood," AS. *ād*, root *idh*. Hence too the Gaulish tribe-name Aedui, and in Welsh *aidd*, "warmth." See *Cormac's Glossary*, translated by J. O'Donovan, ed. W. Stokes.

^c Colgan, *Act. SS. Hib.* p. 200. See also *Acta SS. (Bolland.)* Jan. xxxi. (ii. 112) where will be found "*Vita S. Aidani sive Maedoci Episcopi Fernensis ex duobus veteribus MSS.*"

^d Reeves, *Adamnan's Life of St. Columba*.

years. "This King, having chosen him from among the hostages who appeared before him, for that the grace of God shone in the countenance of the boy, thus spake to his attendants: 'This child is full of grace, and it is fit that he should remain in the royal palace and be with me, or, if it please him, I will send him back free to his parents;'" then, as the old narrator tells the tale, "the blessed boy, full of the Holy Ghost, entreated rather that freedom should be given to those youths who were his companions in captivity; and not only was his request granted, but he was himself restored to his parents, the King predicting his future greatness, and commending himself to his prayers."

Many miraculous tales are told of his boyhood, which was spent among shepherds, until his parents sent him to the celebrated school of St. Finian, at Clonard, where numbers of Saints distinguished for their learning were educated, so that St. Finian is called, in the Annals, tutor or foster-father of the Saints of Ireland; and it was written of him, "he was a philosopher and an eminent divine, and his school was a holy city full of wisdom and virtue."^a Here Moedoc formed a friendship with Molaise of Devenish,^b which lasted throughout the life of that Saint, who was some years his senior. We are told that during his school-days the fame of his sanctity continued to increase, and we read of his tender treatment of a weary deer which sought his protection from pursuing dogs, and how, by laying his waxen tablet between the horns of the animal, he rendered it invisible to the dogs till they had passed. Also, how good men were directed by Heaven to seek his advice as to the choice of a spot whereon to found a church.^c Among these early Christians it was a favourite custom to seek the knowledge of the place they should be buried in from some holy man gifted with the spirit of prophecy, that in that spot they might erect their church and monastic establishment, there to live, and there to remain after death, until the day of the resurrection; and with them the burying-place was not called grave, or tomb, but "the place of resurrection," as if in the minds of these men the thought of death, and the fear that springs from the contemplation of it, had been absorbed in the first fresh joy of the hope of the life eternal. The story runs thus:^d "Another day some good men prayed God to show them the place of their resurrection, wishing to serve God near it. Then the Angel of the Lord said unto them, 'Go ye to St. Moedoc, and he will show unto you the place of your resurrection.' When they had come to him the Saint said unto them, 'Did ye hear the voice of

^a Todd, *Life of St. Patrick*, page 98. O'Donovan, *Notes to the Annals of the Four Masters*, A.D. 548, i. 187.

^b Dr. Reeves, *Proceedings of the R. I. A.* viii. 447.

^c Colgan, *Act. SS.*, p. 208*b*.

^d Colgan, *ibid*.

a bell when ye were coming hither?' They answered, 'We did not hear it.' The Saint said unto them, 'Come with me, and I will show you the place in which ye shall rise again.' They went together, and the Saint of God showed unto them the place of their resurrection, and there those wonder-working men remained during their life and till their death."

One morning towards the close of their school-days the friends Moedoc and Molaise were seated beneath the shadow of two trees, and they prayed to God to reveal to them whether they might continue to live together, or whether it was His will that they should separate and work apart. While they thus prayed, the tree which stood over St. Molaise fell towards the north, while the tree beneath which St. Moedoc was, fell towards the south; then, filled with the Divine Spirit, they said to one another, 'The token for parting is given to us of God, and we must go as these signs have fallen;' so, weeping and kissing one another, the two friends parted, and St. Molaise turned himself to the northern region of Ireland, where he founded the celebrated monastery of Devenish in Lough Erne, while St. Moedoc went southwards and afterwards became the founder of Ferns, in the province of Leinster."^a

The friendship of these holy men seems to have lasted through life, and they visited one another at various times. On one occasion, we find Molaise advising a sorrowing woman to turn for assistance to "Moedoc the most blessed." Her sons had been drowned in Lough Erne, and she had sought help of many Saints, in the hope that at least their bodies might be found. He told her to go to the shore of the lake, there to await the coming of Moedoc; so she hastened to the place, and straightway Moedoc came to her, when the pious mother, weeping bitterly, told her tale: then he, knowing that his friend Molaise had prophesied the return of her sons to life, and trusting in the saying of the holy man, boldly entered the waters of the lake, whence he drew them forth alive; on which their father, who was a powerful chieftain, offered to the Saint one of his sons, with his children and posterity, as a perpetual gift to St. Moedoc for the honour of God." This kind of offering was a common one in the history of old Saints, and belongs to the system of clanship which pervaded the Irish Church. The bishop often being not only *Co-arb*, or spiritual heir of the honoured founder of the church or monastery, but also temporal chieftain, the loyalty of his subjects was confirmed by a double bond, the strongest and most indissoluble by which man can be bound to man.^b

^a Colgan, *Vita S. Maidoci*, *Acta SS. Hib.* 209 a.

^b Todd, *Life of St. Patrick*, p. 226, and Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, iii. 88.

In the life of St. Molaise * we are told that he resolved on making a pilgrimage to Rome, that he might bring thence holy relics as well as some of its clay. He visited his friend St. Moedoc at Ferns before starting on his long journey, and they then entered into a covenant of friendship binding themselves that whomsoever one should bless, the other should bless also, and whomsoever one should curse, the other should curse also. Having accomplished his visit to Rome, he again visited St. Moedoc, and presented him with the relics that he had brought him from thence.

This story, which is of great interest as bearing upon the history of the Shrine in question, proceeds as follows: "On his return home he went to Moedoc and gave him many relics; and Moedoc, on receiving them, said '*Is breac go maith uait me anossa,*' 'I am well variegated by thee now,'—meaning, 'You have given me such a variety of objects, that I am speckled all over with them.' Then, speaking of the reliquary containing the relics, he said, 'Breac Maedoig' ^b (pronounced Brack Mogue, that is, the variegated or speckled of Moedoc) 'shall be its name for ever.'"

The legend was reduced to writing as far back, at all events, as the thirteenth century, for the MS. whence we have taken it is undoubtedly of that date. It proves that at that period a shrine bearing the name of Breac Moedog did exist, and was held in veneration; and as the shrine or reliquary presently to be described is certainly of very great antiquity, and has long borne the name of Breac Moedog in the county of Cavan, it may not be too much to assume that in this interesting relic we have the shrine to which this story refers, though it be not the original receptacle of the relics imported by St. Molaise.

Before establishing his church at Ferns, St. Moedoc passed over to St. David's monastery of Killmuine, or Menevia, in Wales. Here he led a most holy life for some years, and rose so high in the esteem of his master and brethren that his

* *Ancient Life of St. Molaise*, MS. in Irish: Royal Irish Academy Library.

^b It has been questioned whether the name of this shrine was not Bracc, instead of Breac, Moedoc, Bracc being an old Irish word for hand (see Mr. Stokes's edition of *Cormac's Glossary*, page 6, and also Introduction to the same, page xx. Brachium), and that it was meant for holding the relics of St. Moedoc's hand. To this theory Dr. Petrie inclined, but the form of the reliquary does not seem to support it; it is, as it were, a model of a primitive Irish church, whilst the shrines made for hands or arms were generally in the form of the member they were intended to preserve.*

^c The adjective being taken substantively, as is common in Irish, as though one should say, "The speckled treasure of Moedoc."

* Like the Breac-bannagh of Scotland; vide Reeves, *S. Columba*, p. 330.

history became interwoven with that of Menevia, and his abode in Britain is not only described in the accounts of his own acts, but in those of St. David and St. Cadoc. The Welsh have a lively recollection of him under the name of Aeddan Foeddog, son of Caw.^a Traces of his memory are also to be found in Pembroke-shire, he being the reputed founder of Cawhaden in that county, where also the churches of Nolton and West Harold's Town are ascribed to him under the name of Madog.^b On his return to Ireland he founded churches in Wexford, Ardamin, Clonmore, and Ferns, the last taking its name from the tract of land on which it was built, called Fearna or Alder-ground. In Waterford he founded the church of Dysart; in Limerick, Cloncagh; while the churches in his native district that belonged to him were Rossinver, in Leitrim, where to this day he is the patron saint; Killybeg, in Fermanagh, where the miraculous stone called Leac-Moedog was kept; Templeport, where his memory is vividly preserved, and where the ruins of his ancient church may still be seen; and Drumlane,^c in Cavan also, whence the shrine of which we now write was brought. Here an ancient church, of which Moedoc is patron saint, still remains standing, with its round tower. There was a church in existence at Drumlane in the sixth century, but this was totally destroyed before the year 1025, and the present edifice appears to belong to the twelfth century. The round tower is peculiar in this respect, that, while the lower part is built of fine ashlar masonry, the upper part is of the rude rubble work generally thought characteristic of an earlier period: the top is wanting, and it is not more than half its original height.

THE BREAC MOEDOC. After giving these slight particulars respecting the saint himself and his works, we will proceed to the description of the Shrine with which his name is associated. It was bought some years ago by Dr. Petrie from a jeweller in Dublin, into whose possession it came in the following manner. The Shrine had been preserved for many centuries in the church of St. Moedoc at Drumlane, where it had remained in the keeping of the Roman Catholic parish priest: it was occasionally lent for swearing the accused at trials, and so great was the reverence felt for it, that the people believed a false oath taken thereon would be surely followed by some visible judgment. About the year 1846 it was lent to a person named Magauran from the parish of Templeport, he having deposited the usual pledge of a guinea for its safe restoration; tempted, however,

^a Professor Rees's *Essay on the Welsh Saints*, p. 227.

^b Dr. Reeves, *Proceedings R.I.A.* viii. 447.

^c *Vita S. Maidoci*, Colgan, *Acta SS. Hib.* p. 208.

by the Dublin jeweller's offer of a larger sum than that which he had given in pledge, he broke faith with the priest, and sold the sacred relic.*

Plate XIV. represents the leathern case or satchel made for carrying the reliquary. It was an old custom of the Irish^b to carry their books and shrines from place to place through the districts of their patron saints; hence these relic covers were provided with broad leathern straps, fastened to them at each end, such as that seen in the engraving, falling over the case, by which they could be suspended round the neck. These reliquaries were known by the name of *Menistir*, a term signifying a travelling reliquary, while the leathern cases containing their sacred books were termed *Polaire* and *Tiaga*.^c

* Letter from the R. C. parish priest of Drumlane, Rev. Mr. O'Reilly, dated March 1866.

^b *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, v. 110, 116. Petrie, *Eccl. Architecture of Ireland*, pp. 329 to 337.

^c I am indebted to W. M. Hennessy, Esq. for the following note on this peculiar word:—

“Your correspondent is quite correct in observing that Dr. Petrie recognised a difference between the *Polaire* and the *Tiac*, as indeed he could not avoid doing, considering the quotation given at p. 336 of his work on the Round Towers. But it is not easy to decide in what the difference consisted.

“The meaning of the word *Tiac* is perfectly intelligible, for there can be no doubt of its being the same as the Latin *thēca*, an identity which Mr. Stokes, indeed, has already remarked (*Irish Glosses*, p. 70). But a *Tiac* might be used to carry anything, whereas the *Polaire* seems to have been used for carrying books.

“In many glossaries the word *Polaire* is explained *tiac lebar*, ‘a book-satchel,’ but we nowhere meet *tiac* explained *polaire lebar*, ‘a book-case.’ *Polaire* therefore was a generic term for book-satchels.

“But the word *polaire* is used in a different sense in our oldest Irish MS. I refer to *Lebar-na-hulidhre* (circa 1100 A.D.) In a tract treating of the advent of Antichrist, it states that ‘the change of his *polaire* in his forehead will be the signal which he will bear;’ ‘*soad a polaire na etan is é comartha bias fair*.’ I have not had time to examine the ancient legend of Antichrist, to ascertain the exact meaning of *polaire* as here applied, but you may probably know it. It may have some reference to the ‘mark of the beast.’ There is a MS. in Trinity College, illustrated with drawings, representing the appearance of men at his (Antichrist's) advent. The mark of the beast is in the forehead of each, and, as persons come into shops to buy and sell, the shopkeepers are exhibited pointing to the mark, to show that they are of the right sort.

“Perhaps it is in connection with this legend of Antichrist that O'Clery (Glossary printed in Lhwyd's *Archæologia*) explains the word *polaire* as ‘comardha,’ a sign. But this is the only instance in which I find it so explained.

“O'Donovan has given, in his *Supplement to O'Reilly's Irish Dictionary*, voce *polaire*, only the two quotations already given by Dr. Petrie at p. 334, *Eccl. Architecture*. But under *Pallaire* (the same word in another form) he has quoted an extract from Colgan's translation of that part of the Irish Tripartite Life referring to Palladius. The Irish version has ‘ro fothaigh tri ecailsi, i. Cell fine, i farcaib a libair, acus in chomrair co taisib Poil acus Petair, acus in clar i scribad;’ ‘He founded three churches, i.e. Cill-fine, in which he left his books, and the shrine with the relics of Paul and Peter, and the tabula in which he used to write,’ &c. Colgan's translation of this sentence is ‘fecit Kellfine, ubi libros reliquit, una cum scrinio in quo SS. Petri et Pauli reliquiæ asservabantur, et tabulis [quibus?] scribere solebat vulgo *Pallaire* appellatis.” (*Trias Thaumaturga*, p. 123.)



J. E. Petersen sc.

LEATHERN SATCHEL OF THE FREAC MOROC.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London 1871.

This satchel is one of the only two such leathern cases now known to exist in the British Islands, the second being that called the Satchel of the Book of Armagh, which is deposited in the library of Trinity College, Dublin; yet, from the many instances in which such objects are mentioned in our ancient histories, it would appear that they were as common in Ireland as the sacred relics they were designed to preserve.

In an ancient legend preserved in the *Leabhar-Breac* St. Patrick is described as appearing followed by the boy Benen with his *polaire* "on his back." The *polaire*, as well as the *menistir*, was an article necessary to the episcopal character, and is enumerated amongst the presents given by Patrick to Fiacc, Bishop of Sletty. "Patrick gave a *cumtach* to Fiacc, containing, to wit, a bell, and reliquary, and a crozier, and a book satchel;" and St. Columba is said to have blessed

One hundred polaires, noble, one-coloured.*

And again in the same Life it is said, "for it was a practice with him to make crosses, and book satchels, and ecclesiastical implements."^b

"In thus identifying *Pallaire* with *Tabulæ*, I have no doubt that Colgan had in view the Low-Latin *Polerius*, *Pollerius*, which Du Cange explains as 'Catalogus ecclesiarum vel beneficiorum ecclesiasticorum cujuscumque episcopatus, vulgo poullié.'

"In Diefenbach's *Supplement* to Du Cange, the word *paleare*, *palearium*, is interpreted (from old German glossaries) 'das har das einem ochsen am hals hangt,' 'the hair that hangs from the neck of an ox,' and also 'dat fell vor die beesten borst.' But it would be hazardous to assume that *paleare* and *polaire* were one and the same word.

"I ought to have observed that *polaire* is written *benḡab folaḡne* (*fholaire*) in the Tripartite Life (Irish), through influence of aspiration, not because it contains *fólios*, as some have thought.

"This is all that I know about *polaire* and *tiac*."

* *Life of St. Columba*, *Leabhar Breac*, fol. 16, 60.

^b "It is a remarkable fact that all the books in the library of the Abyssinian Monastery of Souriani, on the Natron Lakes in Egypt, were recently found by an English traveller in a condition singularly resembling that of the Book of Armagh, and adding an interesting illustration of a practice probably derived from the same school. 'The books of Abyssinia are bound in the usual way, sometimes in red leather and sometimes in wooden boards, which are occasionally elaborately carved in rude and coarse devices: they are then inclosed in a case, tied up with leathern thongs; to this case is attached a strap, for the convenience of carrying the volume over the shoulders; and by these straps the books are hung to the wooden pegs, three or four on a peg, or more if the books were small: their usual size was that of a small, very thick quarto. Curzon's *Monasteries of the Levant*, p. 93 (Lond. 1849)." This passage is quoted by the Rev. Dr. Reeves in his Notes on the words *polaire* and *tiaga* (*Vita S. Columbæ*, Adamnan, pp. 115, 116, 117,) in which he says, speaking of the latter, "Reliques were also carried in these satchels; 'Aperiens jam S. Fiachra *scetam* suam ad ducendum inde librum baptismi, brachium S. Comgalli in aërem sursum velociter avolavit.' *Vit. S. Comgalli*, c. 50; (Fleming, *Collect.* p. 313a.) It is worthy of notice that in Sulpicius Severus's Preface to

Dr. Petrie's views as to the period at which Irish art reached its culminating point underwent a change in his later days, when he arrived at the conclusion that the arts of metal-work and carving only attained their highest developement in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At the time however when he wrote his great work on Ecclesiastical Architecture, he was inclined to believe that the satchel now under notice belonged to the eighth century. On the strength of an entry in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, "A.D. 937, the Covering of the Book of Armagh," the satchel now in Trinity College library has by some been assigned to that date, and Dr. Petrie considered our satchel to belong to an earlier period of art than the former. It is, however, very doubtful whether the record refers to that object at all, as this satchel seems not to have been made for the Book of Armagh, but for a larger, though thinner, occupant; and the word "Covering" probably has reference to a *cumdach*, or missal case.

As has been observed by Dr. Petrie,^a and may be seen on reference to Plate XIV., "the whole of the ornament on the side exhibited is produced by the interlacing of a number of flat bands, having a line running down their centre, as well as five small circles ornamented with a bead. Unlike the so-called satchel of the Book of Armagh, (of the pattern on one side of which Dr. Petrie has given a diagram,^b) the ornaments are produced, not by a stamp, but by a carving in very low relief,—as the French term it, *gravé en creux*."

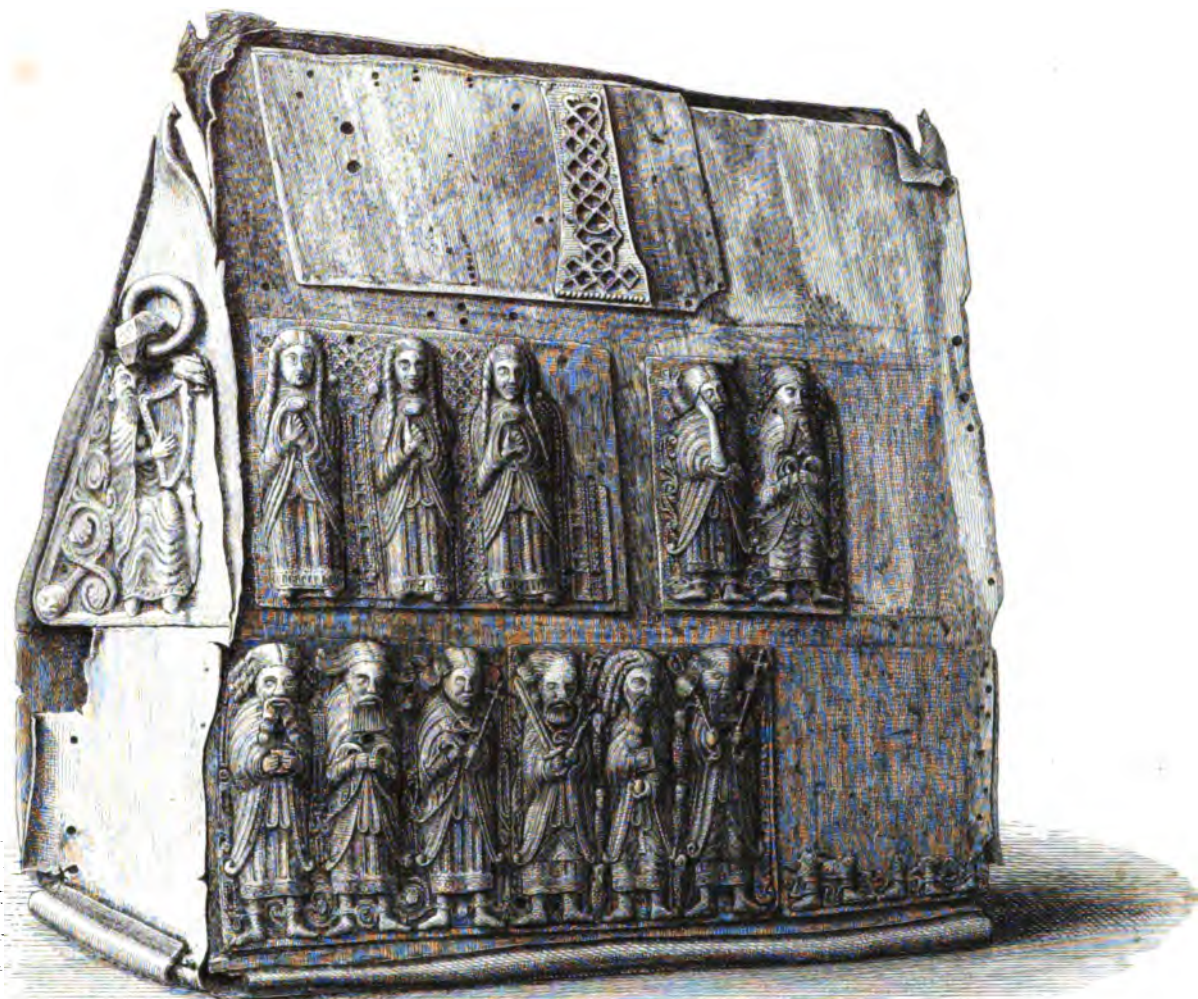
The Breac Moedog, as will be seen from Plate XV., is in form a box, the body or foundation of which is of pale bronze covered with gilt plates. The height of this reliquary is $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches, length $8\frac{7}{8}$ inches, breadth of the base $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. For about one-third of the height the sides of the box are vertical; they then slope inwards until they meet at a very acute angle, so as to resemble the roof of a house. Thus the general form is much like the *chasses* or shrines of Limoges work of much later date, of which many examples exist and have been figured.^c

his *Life of St. Martin*, where the printed text reads 'Libellum quem de Vita S. Martini scripseram *scheda* sua promere,' (Horn, p. 483,) the Book of Armagh uses the more significant term *scetha* (fol. 191 aa). See the curious mention of Tiaga in the legend of Longaradh (Todd's *Introd. to Book of Obits of C. C.*, p. lxxi.); from which it may be inferred that they used to be hung up in the manner already mentioned. (*Ib.* p. 117.)

^a Petrie, *Eccl. Arch.* p. 333.

^b Petrie, *ib.* p. 329.

^c See for instance the *Becket chasse*, belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of London, a woodcut of which is given at p. 537 of the *Catalogue of Works of Art, &c.* exhibited in 1861 at Ironmongers' Hall. A similar shrine is preserved in Hereford cathedral, and will be found engraved in the Rev. F. T. Haver-gal's *Fasti Herefordenses*, plate xi.



J. E. P. P. P. P. P.

THE BOOK OF CERNE OF SAINT MEEDE.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London. 1871

It is not improbable that the form of an early church was intended to be represented in miniature by these shrines. The outlines of that under our notice recall such buildings as the oratory on MacDara's Island;* the church of St. Benignus on the Island of Aran; the oratory at Killaloe, and that of St. Columba at Kells; all having the simple quadrangular form which characterises the primitive churches of Ireland, none of which were octagonal, circular, or cruciform; nor had they the conched semicircular apse of the Roman basilica. They are narrow, with a high-pitched roof, reminding us of a singular representation in the Book of Kells of the Temptation of our Lord, where he is led to the pinnacle of the Temple, in which the form of the Temple is exactly similar to that of these early churches and of the Breac Moedog.



FROM THE BOOK OF KELLS. Fo. 202 *verso*. Scale, $\frac{1}{2}$ linear.

And while on this point it may be interesting to remark, that the Rev. Mr. O'Reilly of Drumlane, writing of this shrine, in March 1866, observes, "It is said, by the people of this parish who saw it, to resemble very closely in shape the great church of Drumlane, now in ruins, of which it is here generally believed to have been the plan in miniature."

The front of this reliquary was covered with figures, 21 in number; only eleven,

* See *Petrie, Eccl. Arch.* p. 189, where this oratory is figured, and also the drawing of the west gable of the oratory at Killaloe, at p. 275 of the same work.

in four groups of three, three, three, and two, remain entire, together with the feet only of another group of three figures. These groups are represented of their actual size in Plate XVI., which has been engraved from electrotpe casts of the originals, and will be described hereafter in detail. The six lower figures on the shrine^a (figs. *c* and *d*) are of pale bronze, while the five upper ones (figs. *e* and *f*) appear to be of the same metal, though much redder in colour from the deficiency of tin in the alloy. The ends are now robbed of all ornament with the exception of one figure (of bronze gilt) seated and playing on a harp. This figure is given also from an electrotpe in Plate XVI., fig. *a*. The back was evidently exactly similar to that of the Shrine of St. Patrick, and indeed the design is such as is usually found on the least important side of all early reliquaries, namely, a parallelogram of pierced rectangular crosses. The same design is found at the bottom of the shrine, represented in Plate XVII. The pierced work, it should be mentioned, is of bronze; the border, of which only three fragments remain, has a ground of red enamel; the margins, the knots, and squares being of bronze gilt; while the pattern within the squares is formed by four smaller squares of blue glass, apparently cast in a mould and disposed alternately with five others of red and white enamel. The "fylfot" in the boss which still remains in the centre of the border of one side is enamelled in blue on a gold ground, surrounded by alternate lines of the same colour.

We will now proceed to a detailed description of the several groups of figures, beginning with the three male figures represented in fig. *d*, Plate XVI. and engraved in Plate XVIII., from a photograph enlarged to three times the actual size.

The first figure holds a sword in his right hand, like that of the ecclesiastic in one of the illuminations of the Book of Deir;^b another such appears in plate lxxx. of the same work. The sceptres of the first and third figures bursting into leaf and fruit seem to be peculiar to the sacred figures of Irish art. Christ is seen to hold such a one in the last judgment as represented on the cross of Clonmacnois; while in the Book of Kells they are borne in the hands of angels at the feet of the Blessed Virgin and Child; and one is also carried by St. Matthew. (See woodcuts on the next page.) The sceptre in the hand of the third figure, if inverted, bears a strong resemblance to our ancient crosiers. The central figure holds a book in the right hand, and in the left a vase, somewhat resembling ancient

^a The figures in Plate XVI. are not arranged precisely as they occur on the reliquary.

^b Fo. 4 b of the MS. figured in Mr. Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. pl. v.

FIGURES FROM
THE BREAC MCEDOG.

Vol. XLIII. Plate XVI. page 140.



Fig a.



Fig b.



Fig c.



Fig d.



Fig e.



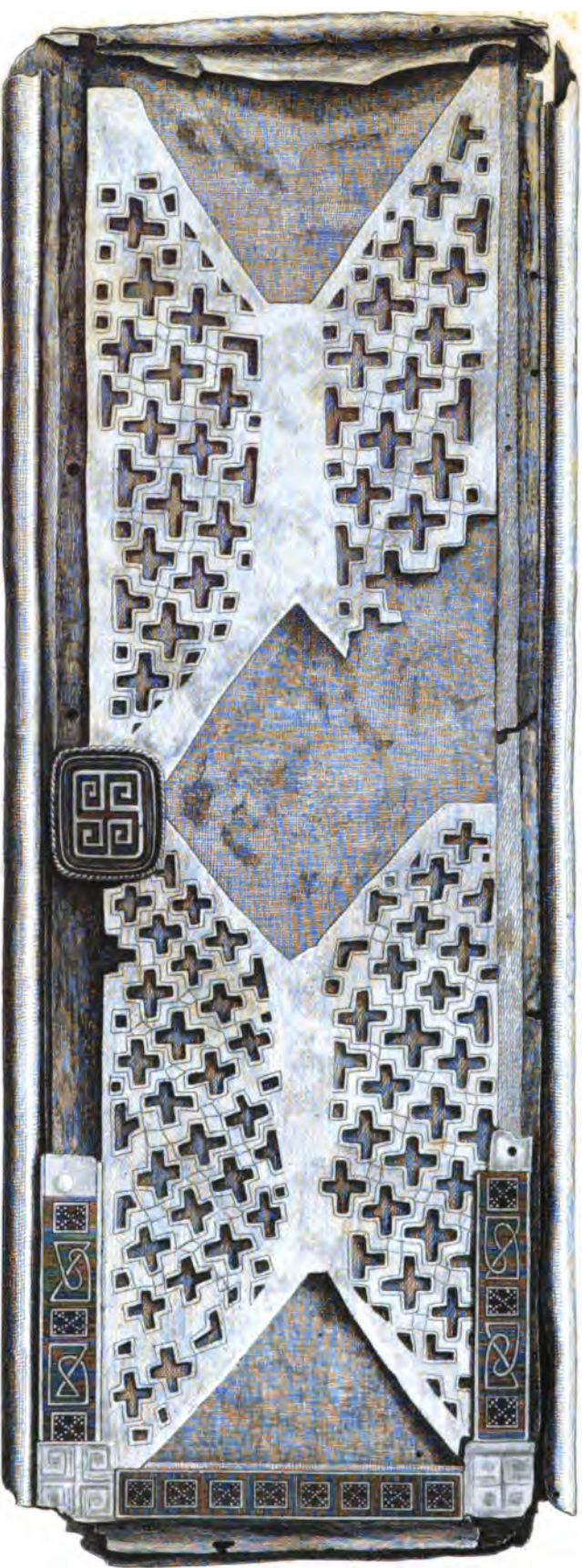
Fig f.

J. Hayman Peterson del. et sc.

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100

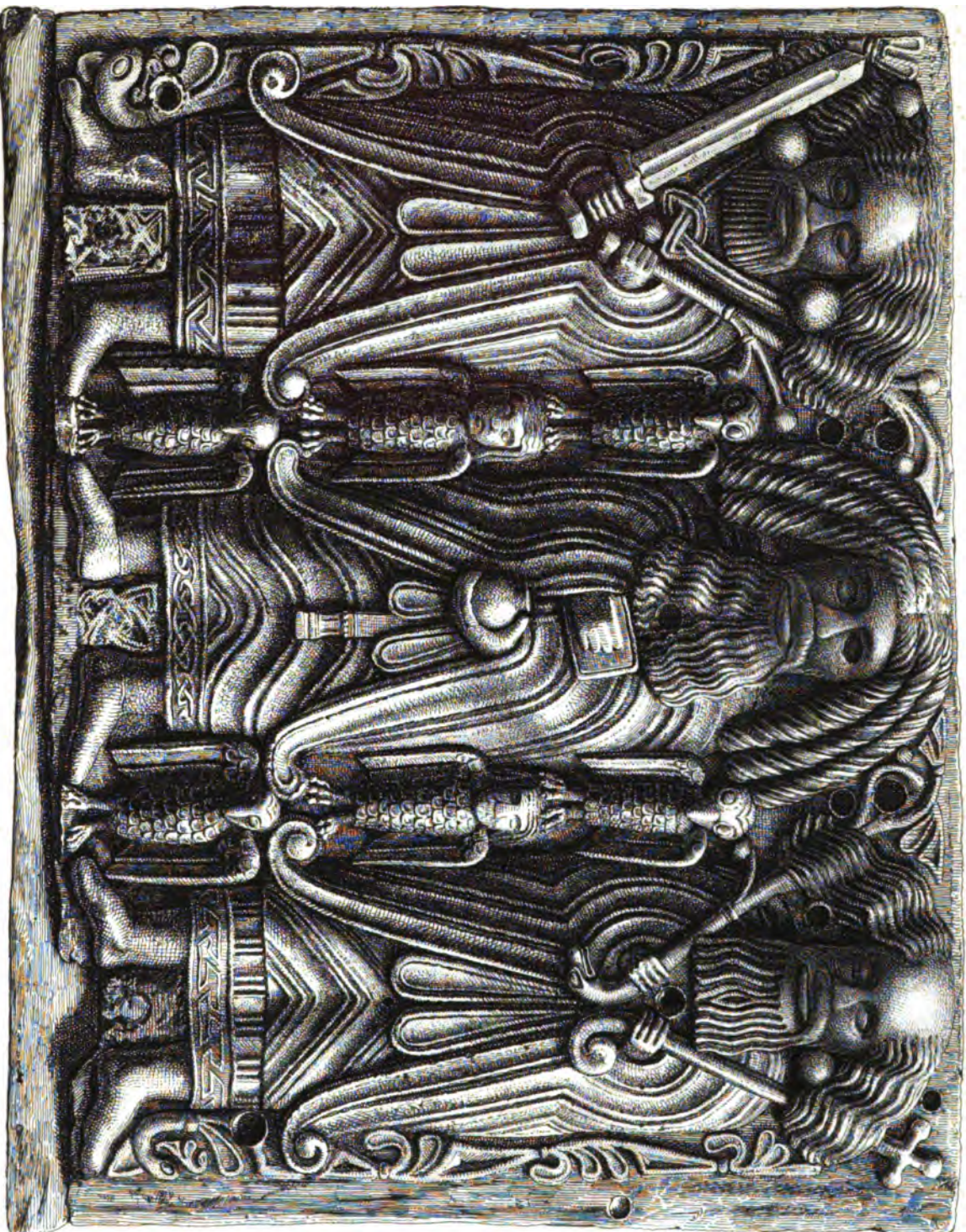
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Tumbac Monedoc

BASE OF THE TUMBAC MONEDOC.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1871.

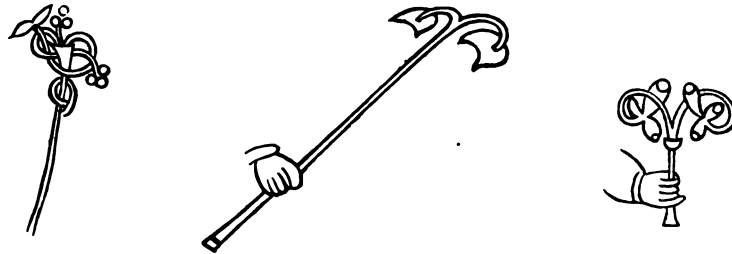


GROUP OF FIGURES FROM THE BREAC MOEDOG.

(much enlarged.)

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1871.

J. Rogers sculp.



FROM THE BOOK OF KELLS.

vessels, now preserved in the Royal Irish Academy Museum, which were probably used for holy water. The divisions between the compartments of the arcade occupied by these figures are ornamented with birds, two of which we imagine may typify cherubim; they are winged beings with human heads, others owl-headed—perhaps beings of evil omen, as forms of an exactly similar nature occur in a singular representation of Christ crucified with the two thieves (see woodcut, reduced to a scale two-thirds linear, from a tracing made by Mrs. J. P. Mahaffy, from the original illumination), in an Irish manuscript preserved in the library of Würzburg, where the cherubim are seen ministering to the penitent thief, whilst the ill-omened birds are pecking at the impenitent sinner.



This manuscript is, according to Dr. Reeves, not older than 700, and not later than A.D. 750. It is called St. Kilian's, though it is certainly not his, but rather the work of the Irish immigrants to his church, long after his martyrdom.*

The remains of an inscription running over the heads in the next group (see Plate XVI., fig. c) of small figures may be traced, but unfortunately it is so much broken away that no attempt can be made to decipher it. The borders round the ends of the dresses are of extreme interest, being formed of designs most characteristic of Scoto-Celtic art, patterns formed of angular lines and interlaced bands. On one of these figures, as also in one of those of the other group, as enlarged in Plate XVIII., the collar brought round the neck and knotted over the breast, so as to form a *triquetra*, at once recalls to mind the figures of the Evangelists in the Book of Dimma, who wear the triquetra thus as a symbol of the Trinity. The first figure holds a book, the third a cross exactly like one found on a sculptured stone in Killgowan, co. Kildare, supposed to commemorate a battle fought in the eighth century.



SCULPTURED STONE AT KILLGOWAN. (Height 6 ft. 8 in.)
(From a drawing by the Rev. Francis Shearman.)

The third group (Plate XVI. fig. e) represents three female Saints with hands clasped upon the bosom standing in an arcade.. It is not impossible that St. Brigid, who died A.D. 525, and the holy Virgin Dymphna, the patron saint of Gheel

* *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*. Zeuss (*Gram. Celt. Introd.* p. 29) also assigns the MS. to the eighth century.

(A.D. 500) in the Low Countries, may be here represented. The three are all in uniform costume. "The dress of the Irish nuns was white, nor were there any distinct orders of them in Ireland until some centuries after Brigid's time, as they all followed the rule that she had observed."^a Now, while there is more or less difference in the dress of the men on this shrine, that of the women is exactly similar; their hair hangs in long curls, and the historian just quoted^b tells us, "We find nothing about cutting of hair, which was not practised in the profession of holy Virgins as early, or at least as generally, as the regulation of their wearing a particular habit." One of the most interesting of the historical notices in the *Chronicon Scotorum* refers to this custom. "A.D. 888, change of cutting of hair by the Virgins of Erin."^c It seems to have been the habit in the monasteries of Egypt and Syria in the early ages of the Church to cut off the hair of virgins and widows dedicated to God in religion, as appears from a passage of St. Jerome, but this practice does not appear to have prevailed in other parts of the Christian Church in the earliest ages, and it is not easy to determine the date when the ceremony of cutting the hair of nuns in token of subjection to a life of penance and mortification was introduced generally into the West.^d

The long curls of these three figures call to mind the heads with plaited hair seen on a capital in the church of St. Ottmar, Nuremberg. It is curious to notice that the hands are reversed from their natural form, as if taken from a mould in which they were correctly represented. The very long faces and low broad forehead remind one forcibly of the type of female face which we find in the Book of Kells. The pellet-moulding round the arch and down the sides is remarkable, as also a design formed by the geometrical arrangement of a leaf filling the space between the arches.

Two male figures are shown in Plate XVII. fig. *f*. In noticing the details of this group, that which strikes us most is the scroll running up the right side of the first figure. It is a beautiful example of the divergent spiral, or trumpet pattern. At the base of this scroll is the triquetra, and this favourite design, symbolical of the Trinity, is found in another form between the feet of the two figures. Knots of other kinds and a diaper background complete the ornamental work of this group. The costume of the figures appears to be merely the alb, with an embroidered border (the apparel) and the chasuble, which in its primitive form was circular, with an aperture in the centre for the head: it was then worn caught up on the arms, over which it fell in folds.

^a Lanigan, *Eccl. Hist.* i. 387.

^c *Chronicon Scotorum*, p. 171.

^b See *Life of St. Dymphna*, by the Rev. J. O'Hanlon.

^d W. M. Hennessy, *Introduction to Chron. Scot.* p. li.

The late Dr. Todd supposed these figures to be seated, and, if so, the second object held in the hand may be part of one of the ornamented arms of the *sedilia* in which they are placed.

In the descriptions hitherto given by other writers of the drawing of the human figure in Irish art, whether in metal work, stone, or painting, no language but that of contempt has been used. One writer, speaking of the extraordinary rudeness of this art, characterises the features in all the representations of Christ crucified as "utterly expressionless;" while another describes a miniature belonging to this school as the purest type to be found "of all that is false and debasing in art, and significant of an utterly dead school, a school of dead barbarism, whose work belongs to the hopeless work of all ages." But we shall be grievously disappointed if they who see these four groups from the shrine of St. Moedoc fail to perceive in them some elements of nobleness and some food for reverence.

In the forms and faces of the female figures there is not only strong individuality of character, but this character is one of sweetness, benevolence, and simple goodness, carried out not only in the expression of the faces, but in the mere attitude of the figures, and the quiet clasping of the hands upon the breast. The impassioned sorrow of the left-hand figure in the next group (Plate XVI. fig. *f.*), and the contrast between his earnest tearful gaze and the cheerful common sense expressed in his companion's face,—the solemn and severe dignity of the other six holy men who stand below—the strength of their firmly-closed mouths and wistful outstretched gaze—their wild and wavy hair blown in great masses round the head, the mystic breastplate, and borders of their robes—all tell of the existence of a dramatic as well as of a religious element in early Irish art, which elevates above that which is purely decorative, and is as much beyond the art of the mere savage or barbarian as the faith which teaches of goodness and purity and love transcends the dark superstitions of heathenism.

THE SOISCCEL MOLAISE.—The other object of early Irish workmanship to which I desire to direct attention is known as the *Soiscel Molaise* (Seeshkel Molash), and is preserved in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy. It derives its name from the Irish word for gospel *soiscel* (pronounced seeshkel), because it formerly contained a copy of the gospels which is now lost, supposed to have been written by St. Molaise of Devenish. It is a small box or *cumdach* of yellow mixed metal, such as that made to hold the Gospel of St. Moling, or the Book of Dimma, in Trinity College Library, Dublin. The date of this reliquary, if so it may be called, can hardly be of a period later than the close

of the tenth century. The inscription which it bears proves that it was executed for the use of Cennfailad, who died early in the eleventh century, as we are told in the Annals of the Four Masters: "A.D. 1025, Cennfaeladh son of Flaithbheartach, successor of Molaise of Daimhinis, died."

The shrine was preserved by the family of O'Meehan, in the county of Leitrim, who for more than 500 years were representatives (*comarbas*) of St. Molaise in Devenish. Mr. Meehan, so late as the year 1845, still held the reliquary in his possession.*

As in the former instance, I will preface the description of this book-shrine with some biographical particulars of the saint with whose memory it is traditionally connected.

The simple form of the name Molaise is Lasren. It has already been observed that "Mo," signifying "My," was a favourite term of devotion, prefixed to the names of saints in Ireland. The year of his birth is not recorded, but, as noticed above, we know that he studied at the great school of St. Finian at Clonard, where he became the friend of St. Moedoc. It is rather curious that the names of these two remarkable men have very much the same meaning; Aedh signifying "fire," and Lasren being the diminutive of *Lasair*, "a flame."^b On both sides Molaise was of royal extraction, his father being seventh in descent from Crunn Badhrui, a celebrated chieftain and king of the Rudrician race of Ulster, and his mother Monua descended from the royal line of the kings of Ulster.

Many instances are given of the wonderful grace and charity which shone in the character of Molaise during his youth and boyhood. Soon after leaving school he retired to Daimh-inis (Devenish), in Lough Erne, where he erected a monastery which became very famous. He was probably settled at Devenish some years before St. Columba's exile from Ireland in the year 563. Irish writers tell us that it was owing to the sentence pronounced by Molaise in condemnation of Columba that this saint was driven from his native land, "because he (Columba) had been the cause of three battles being fought." The life of this saint in Devenish does not seem to have been in any way that of a solitary or ascetic in the strict sense of the word. He was visited by many holy men of the period,

* See paper read by Dr. Petrie before the Academy June 26, 1855, in MS.

^b *Lasair*, flame (gl. *flamma*): the word is probably connected with *loscad*, W. *llog*, Corn. *leski*.—See Zeuss, p. 143. *Lasair* (= *laxarac*) is the W. *llachar*. (See *Irish Glosses*, 128, p. 156, ed. by Mr. W. Stokes.)

The Irish used the diminutive of the names of saints as a mark of affection. The diminutive was formed by the termination *an*, *en*, or *in*, or by adding the adjective *oc* or *og*, little. Thus *Aodh*, diminutive *Aodhan*, or *aodh*, *og*, *Sen*, *Senan*, or *Senog*, &c. (Dr. Todd, *Mart. of Don. App. Int.* xliii. n.)

and in an ancient poem we find, that, though to himself he was denying, he was generous to others :—

Molaise of the Lake loves
To be in a prison of hard stone,
To have a house of guests for the men of Erin
Without refusal, without a particle of churlishness.*

Among his many visitors were the sons of one Declan, who were ordered by Molaise to write for him a *Soscel* (*Só-scél*, which means *bonus nuntius*), which they did in the space of two days and one night, the light of the sun illuminating the night through the grace of the saint.

Another gospel is, however, referred to in the life of this saint in the story of his visit to Rome, where he is said to have gone in order that he might write his life there, and bring from thence some of its clay and relics to Erin. On his way thither he visited "Tor-inis-Martin," Tours in France.

The following passage is translated by Mr. Hennessy from the Irish Life of the Saint :—

"On his arrival in Rome in the evening the gates were closed, nor would the porter open them at his request; whereupon he knocked thrice with his hand, and the city shook so much from the effects of the blows, that all the citizens imagined the day of judgment was at hand. Everything that was fastened in Rome became opened. Molaise entered the city. The citizens proceeded in a body to where the Pope was, who asked them if they knew the cause of the noise. The gatekeeper told his Holiness that a powerful holy cleric of the Gaedhil had arrived the previous evening, after the closing of the gates; and, although he himself had refused to open the gates, God did not refuse. Then the 'Abbat of Rome' directed that Molaise should be brought before him. The latter appeared, was welcomed, and ordered 'to say a mass in the presence of the Pope, and the whole community of Rome.' 'If you are a man of God,' said they, 'you will not refuse that task.' They were not wise in contemning, and deceiving, and testing Molaise. Molaise went with them to the great altar of Peter in Rome. The altar was prepared in his presence, and no mass-book was put upon it, and no *cruisce* (goblet), and no bell. Molaise mused, and then said that he never celebrated mass without these three things; and forthwith they were sent from heaven on the altar, through his prayer; a mass-book not large, which was subsequently called the *soscel*, and which alone, of the three articles, Molaise

* Martyrology of Donegal, p. 245.

consented to accept of after they had fulfilled their office. Molaise said he would only have the Soscel Bec (little Soscel), whereupon the Pope said Bec shall be its name, wherefore it is called the Soscel Bec of Molaise. He remained in Rome, where he wrote the Rules and Laws that are necessary for Erinn. On his return home he found before him the bell and *cruisce* (goblet), and he sent them back to Rome thrice, but they were miraculously returned to him. Some of the relics that he brought from Rome were buried in the little *reilig* (cemetery) of Devenish, to which, in consequence, great privileges were attached. He voyaged across the sea, coming home on a flagstone, "which is yet preserved at Devenish to perpetuate the memory of the miracle."

The next remarkable act of which we read in the life of St. Molaise is the leading part which he took in the dispute, referred to by Dr. Petrie in the paper on Tara Hill, between St. Ruadhan of Lorrha and Diarmait Mac-Cerbhaill, when St. Ruadhan vented his anger by cursing the hill of Tara, which deed was so displeasing to St. Molaise that he went home in wrath.^a

The year of his death is uncertain, it being assigned by some to 563-564, and by others to 570-571.^b It is stated in the life of Ciaran of Cluain that the order of Molaise was one of the eight orders that were in Erin, and that after completing thirty years he went to heaven A.D. 563. On the 15th day of September the festival and holiday of Molaise used to be celebrated at Ballaghmeehan (Bealach Ui Mithidein, in the parish of Rossinver, co. Leitrim).^c

The still existing remains on Devenish Island are the round tower and the great monastery of Devenish. A stone coffin now exposed in the neighbourhood of the tower is called his bed, and his cell still stands, and has been described by Dr. Petrie as a beautiful example of ancient masonry.^d

The box of St. Molaise's Gospels is made of plates of bronze of three colours, one almost red like copper, and the other two of different degrees of yellow, due probably to different quantities of tin entering into their combination: these plates are riveted and turned over at the edges. It is of oblong form, consisting of five plates, forming front and back pieces ($5\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size), two opposite sides $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and a third side, which for distinction we will call the base. The sixth plate, which would form the lid, is now wanting. The ornamental portions consist of plates of silver with gilt patterns, riveted to the bronze

^a Petrie, Hist. and Antiq. of Tara Hill, in *Trans. R.I.A.*, vol. xvii., Antiquities, p. 125.

^b *Four Masters*: Colgan, Acta SS., p. 192. Ussher, Ind. Chron. 570.

^c *Martyrology of Donegal*, p. 247.

^d Petrie, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, sec. 4, p. 434.

box. Plates XIX. XX. and XXI. are taken from enlarged photographs, and show respectively the base, one of the sides, and the front.

Our figure of the base (Plate XIX.) is perhaps the most interesting, showing as it does the inscription which has enabled the historian to fix the date of the object, and which proves it to be the oldest relic yet found in Ireland the date of which can be ascertained with any amount of accuracy. It may, according to Petrie and O'Donovan, be thus written in full :

✠ Oponc do [cenn]failad do chomapba molari lar an [depnab] in cumdach
ro ✠ ocup do gillabaithin chep do rigm in gnera.

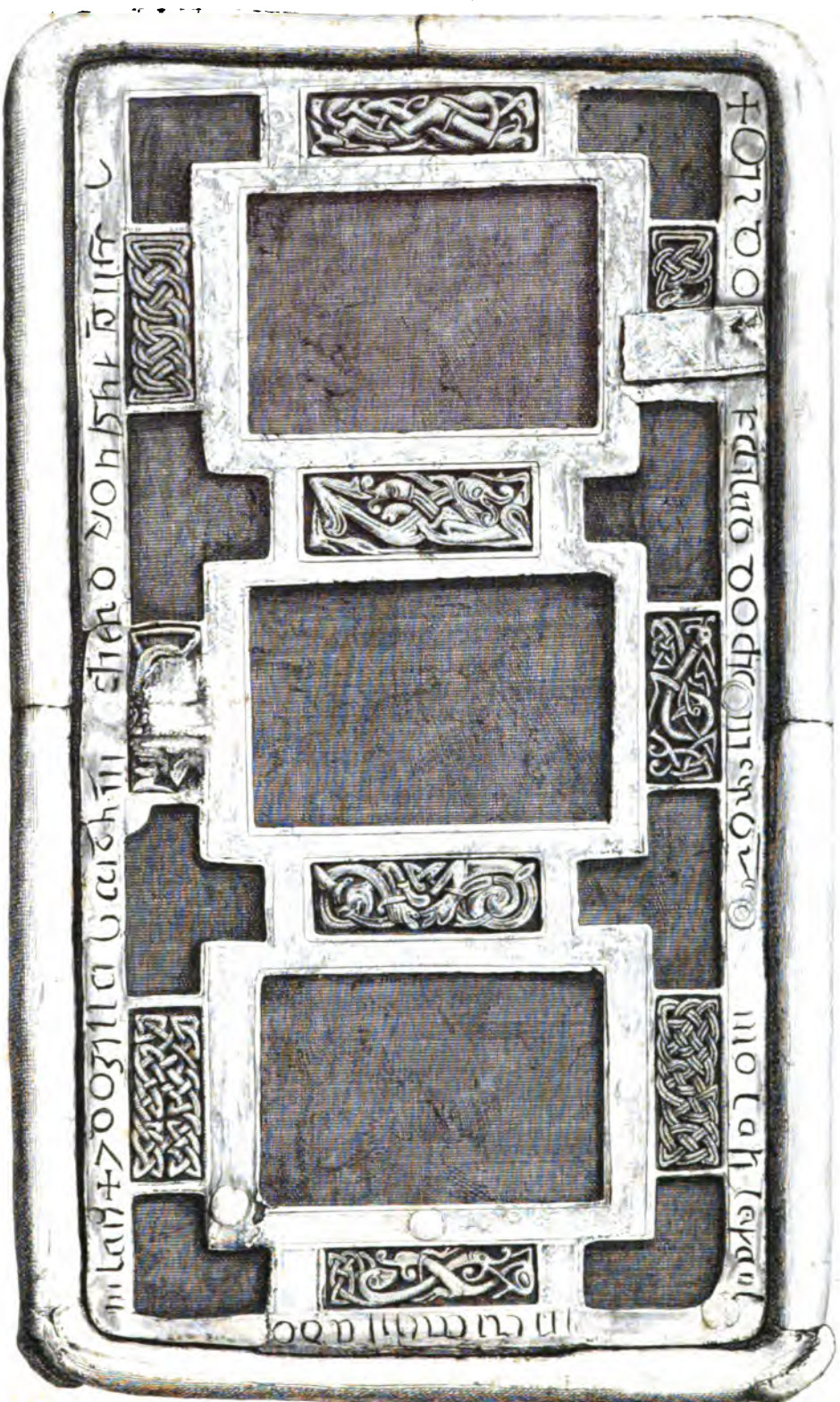
"A prayer for Cennfailad for (the) successor of Molaise, by whom this case was [made ?] and for Gillabaithin, the artificer who executed this embossment."

In the Annals of Ulster we find the following passage,

"A.D. 1025, Cennfaeladh son of Flaithbertach, successor of Molaise of Daimhinis (Devenish), fell asleep in Christ."

The Four Masters under the same year have "Cennfaoladh son of Flaithbertach, successor of Molaise of Daimhinis (Devenish), died."

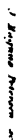
In order to give an idea of the general effect of the whole case an attempt has been made in Plate XX. to restore those parts of the tracery at the side of the box which are now lost, the designs being taken from other parts of the same shrine or from the Book of Kells. On this side of the case is seen a robed ecclesiastical figure holding an object believed by Dr. Petrie to be a pastoral staff of a very ancient form. Details are revealed however by this magnified photograph which would rather lead us to believe it to be the brush or aspersory in use in the present day in the service of the Roman Catholic Church. A book is held in the other hand. This figure was probably intended to represent St. Molaise himself. A similar tablet on the side bearing the inscription had, no doubt, corresponding figures, but they have been lost. The chasuble worn by this ecclesiastic was evidently embroidered. The design upon it would appear to have been palm-leaves. The vesture round the neck, giving the appearance of a collar cut in "vandykes," is also interesting, and unlike anything we have hitherto seen. It is curious that the tonsure, so distinctly shown in the Book of Durrow, does not appear on this figure or any of those on the shrine of St. Moedoc. In the details of the tracery we perceive the Triquetra knot and a singu ar kind of lizard whose head is formed with very long ears like



J. E. Petersen

BASE OF THE SOLSKEL NOLAIZE.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London 1871.

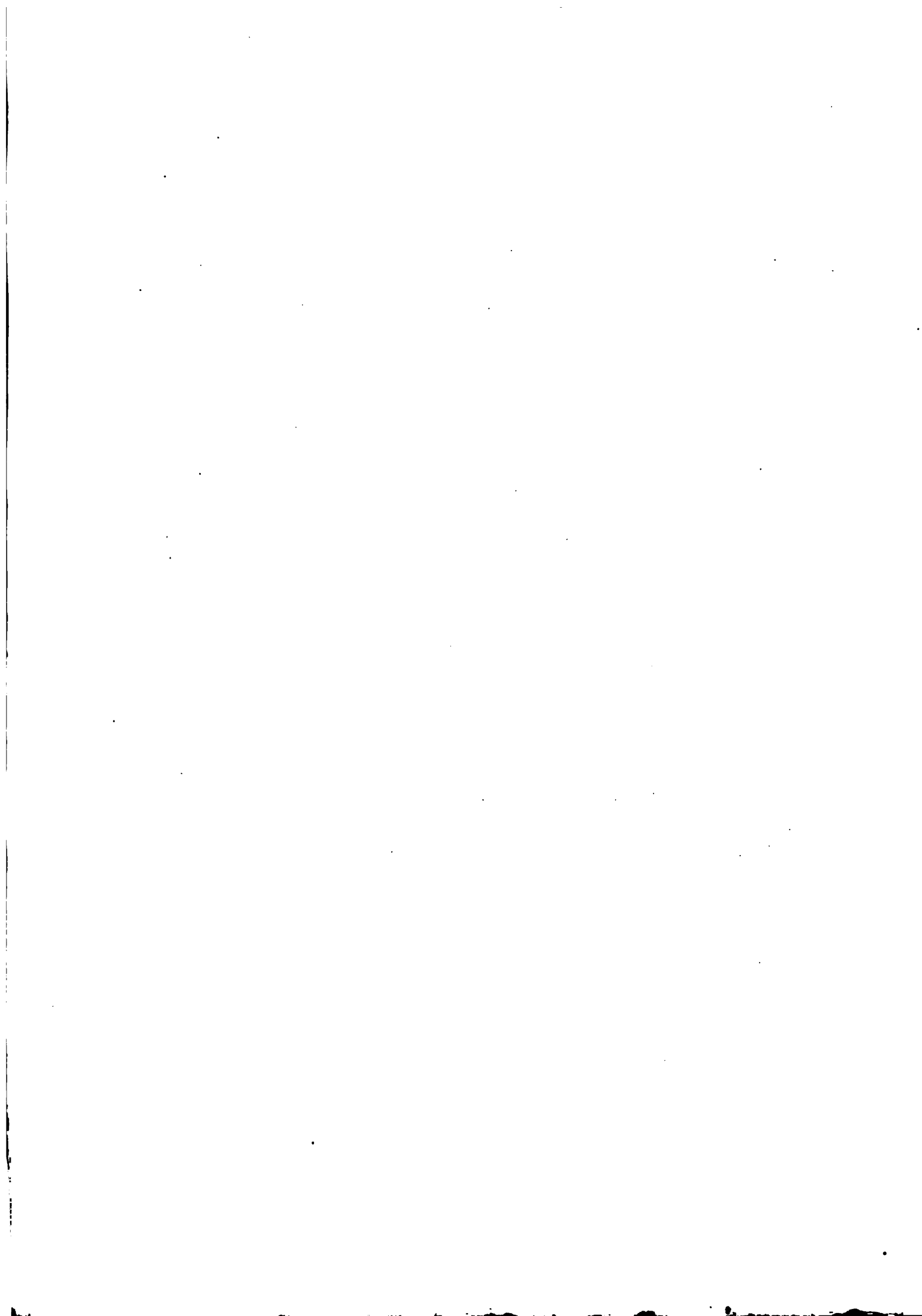


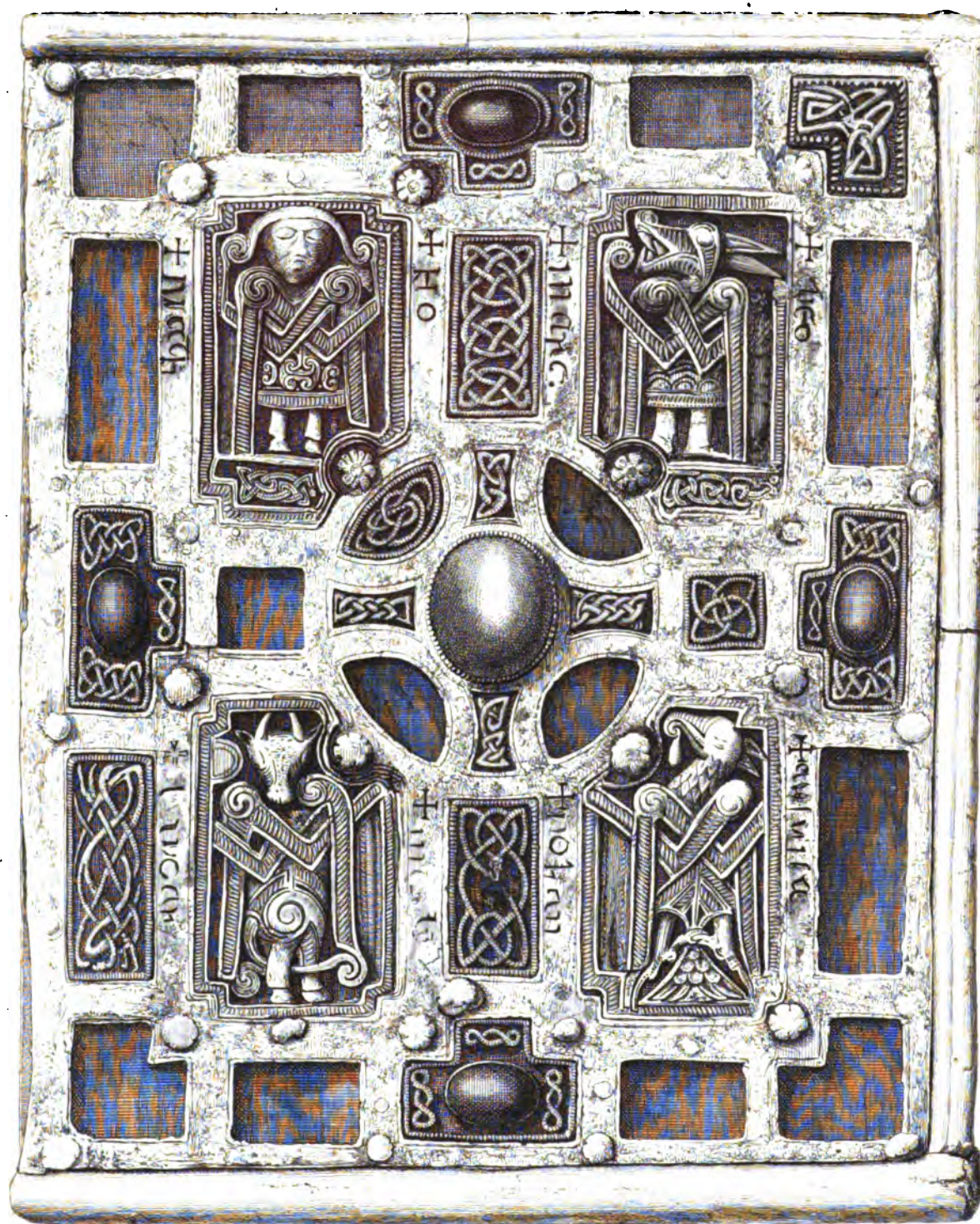
SIDE OF THE SOCIÉTÉ MOLAISE.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1871

1







J. Mayne, Dublin, etc.

FRONT OF THE SOISCÉL MOLAÍSE.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London 1871.

horns; an animal which constantly occurs in the Book of Kells, but which we have not hitherto met with elsewhere. In the woodcut inserted as a tail-piece to this paper, we see represented the original and very curious hinge by which the case was opened, which presents the common dog's-head Irish ornament.*

Plate XXI. shows the principal face of the box, on which are represented the four evangelical symbols, with a cross surrounded by a circle in the centre. The work upon this side is wonderfully delicate and minute, even as seen in this magnified form. How much more so must the original be when we remember that it is only one half the size of the drawing. The divergent spiral or trumpet pattern is seen on all the four figures, but the most exquisitely perfect example of it is on the front of the garment worn on the winged man symbolizing St. Matthew. The name of each symbol and its accompanying Evangelist appears at the sides of the figures. Leo, Aquila, Ho . . . Marc. Johan. Math. Lucas, can be now deciphered, though the letters are very much rubbed.

On the back the ornamentation consists only of that design which is found also on the back and the base of the shrine of St. Moedoc, namely, a parallelogram of pierced rectangular crosses.

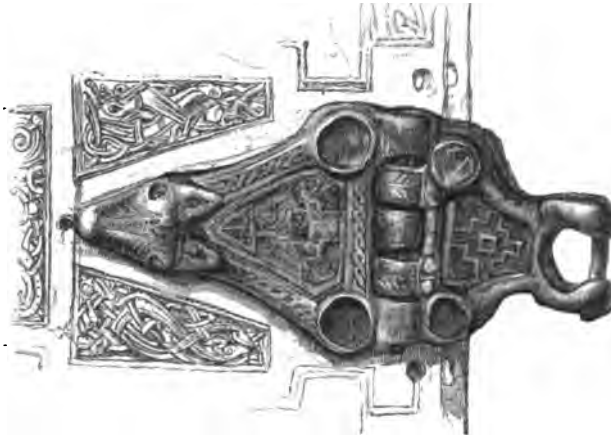
We have desired to bring these two works vividly before the Society of Antiquaries, as we believe them to be singularly characteristic examples of Celtic art of the Christian period. They have been photographed, since by this process alone an absolutely faithful reproduction can be obtained. These photographs represent the objects in a magnified form, that so, to use the words of Giraldus Cambrensis,^b "you may examine the inmost secrets of that wondrous art, and that its delicate, subtle, fine, and closely-wrought lines, twisted and interwoven with intricate knots, its perfection and mystery, may be fully revealed to your minds."

Among these designs we see some which indeed are common to the ancient art of all people, such as the chevron or zigzag, the lozenge, birds, serpents, foliage, scroll, diaper, bead, &c.; but there are some also which are peculiar to the

* This should appear in Plate XX. instead of the staple of the hinge, with a ring for suspension, which in the original is on the opposite side of the case. The drawing was made from an electrotpe reproduction of the shrine, which was necessarily manufactured in several pieces. In fastening these portions together the hinge and the staple, which are just of the same size, and occupy similar spaces in the two opposite sides, were misplaced. The error was not discovered until after the plate had been engraved.

^b *Topogr. Hib. dist.* ii. c. 38.

Hiberno-Celtic population of this island, as, for instance, the divergent spiral line or trumpet pattern which appears in the work of a period earlier than the intercourse of Rome with these islands, and which in Ireland continued late, and remained to the twelfth century the great and distinguishing characteristic of her art. There we find also other forms of design which would seem to have travelled to these islands with Christianity, however afterwards modified by the taste and genius of this people, such as that which resembles a diagonal form of the Greek fret, and such knots as the *triquetra*, with the thousand varying examples of interlaced work. In the art of many other ancient people, such as in the sculptures on the early Syrian churches, the mosaics of Christian art of Italy, the ornaments and vessels of the Moors and Arabians, interlaced designs occasionally appear, but these are of comparatively rare occurrence. Sir William Hamilton has said, "There is a reason in every ornament why it should recommend itself to a peculiar people;" and in the nature of this especial one, in its capacity for grace, and variety in its infinite power of conveying a sense of mystery and complexity, we may find the key to the fact of its being adopted by this people with such enthusiastic fondness, appealing, as it did, to some chord of sympathy in the hearts of an imaginative people like the Celts, who doubtless found in its subtle and intricate nature, expression for much that was delicate, refined, and thoughtful, mingled with their own wild fancy and love of mysticism.



HINGE OF THE SOISCCEL MOLAISE.

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